

Last Letter

What happened that night? Your final night.
Double, treble exposure
Over everything. Late afternoon, Friday,
My last sight of you alive.
Burning your letter to me, in the ashtray,
With that strange smile. Had I bungled your plan?
Had it surprised me sooner than you purposed?
Had I rushed it back to you too promptly?
One hour later—you would have been gone
Where I could not have traced you.
I would have turned from your locked red door
That nobody would open
Still holding your letter,
A thunderbolt that could not earth itself.
That would have been electric shock treatment
For me.
Repeated over and over, all weekend,
As often as I read it, or thought of it.
That would have remade my brains, and my life.
The treatment that you planned needed some time.
I cannot imagine
How I would have got through that weekend.
I cannot imagine. Had you plotted it all?

Your note reached me too soon—that same day,
Friday afternoon, posted in the morning.
The prevalent devils expedited it.
That was one more straw of ill-luck
Drawn against you by the Post-Office
And added to your load. I moved fast,
Through the snow-blue, February, London twilight.
Wept with relief when you opened the door.
A huddle of riddles in solution. Precocious tears
That failed to interpret to me, failed to divulge
Their real import. But what did you say
Over the smoking shards of that letter
So carefully annihilated, so calmly,
That let me release you, and leave you
To blow its ashes off your plan—off the ashtray
Against which you would lean for me to read
The Doctor's phone-number.

My escape

Had become such a hunted thing
Sleepless, hopeless, all its dreams exhausted,
Only wanting to be recaptured, only
Wanting to drop, out of its vacuum.

Two days of dangling nothing. Two days gratis.
Two days in no calendar, but stolen
From no world,
Beyond actuality, feeling, or name.

My love-life grabbed it. My numbed love-life
With its two mad needles,
Embroidering their rose, piercing and tugging
At their tapestry, their bloody tattoo
Somewhere behind my navel,
Treading that morass of emblazon,
Two mad needles, criss-crossing their stitches,
Selecting among my nerves
For their colours, refashioning me
Inside my own skin, each refashioning the other
With their self-caricatures,

Their obsessed in and out. Two women
Each with her needle.

That night
My dellarobbia Susan. I moved
With the circumspection
Of a flame in a fuse. My whole fury
Was an abandoned effort to blow up
The old globe where shadows bent over
My telltale track of ashes. I raced
From and from, face backwards, a film reversed,
Towards what? We went to Rugby St
Where you and I began.
Why did we go there? Of all places
Why did we go there? Perversity
In the artistry of our fate
Adjusted its refinements for you, for me
And for Susan. Solitaire
Played by the Minotaur of that maze
Even included Helen, in the ground-floor flat.
You had noted her—a girl for a story.
You never met her. Few ever met her,
Except across the ears and raving mask
Of her Alsatian. You had not even glimpsed her.
You had only recoiled
When her demented animal crashed its weight
Against her door, as we slipped through the hallway;
And heard it choking on infinite German hatred.

That Sunday night she eased her door open
Its few permitted inches.
Susan greeted the black eyes, the unhappy
Overweight, lovely face, that peeped out

Across the little chain. The door closed.
We heard her consoling her jailor
Inside her cell, its kennel, where, days later,
She gassed her ferocious kupo, and herself.

Susan and I spent that night
In our wedding bed. I had not seen it
Since we lay there on our wedding day.
I did not take her back to my own bed.
It had occurred to me, your weekend over,
You might appear—a surprise visitation.
Did you appear, to tap at my dark window?
So I stayed with Susan, hiding from you,
In our own wedding bed—the same from which
Within three years she would be taken to die
In that same hospital where, within twelve hours,
I would find you dead.

Monday morning
I drove her to work, in the City,
Then parked my van North of Euston Road
And returned to where my telephone waited.

What happened that night, inside your hours,
Is as unknown as if it never happened.
What accumulation of your whole life,
Like effort unconscious, like birth
Pushing through the membrane of each slow second
Into the next, happened
Only as if it could not happen,
As if it was not happening. How often
Did the phone ring there in my empty room,
You hearing the ring in your receiver—
At both ends the fading memory
Of a telephone ringing, in a brain
As if already dead. I count
How often you walked to the phone-booth
At the bottom of St George's terrace.
You are there whenever I look, just turning
Out of Fitzroy Road, crossing over
Between the heaped up banks of dirty sugar.
In your long black coat,
With your plait coiled up at the back of your hair
You walk unable to move, or wake, and are
Already nobody walking
Walking by the railings under Primrose Hill
Towards the phone booth that can never be reached.
Before midnight. After midnight. Again.
Again. Again. And, near dawn, again.
At what position of the hands on my watch-face

Did your last attempt,
Already deeply past
My being able to hear it, shake the pillow
Of that empty bed? A last time
Lightly touch at my books, and my papers?
By the time I got there my phone was asleep.
The pillow innocent. My room slept,
Already filled with the snowlit morning light.
I lit my fire. I had got out my papers.
And I had started to write when the telephone
Jerked awake, in a jabbering alarm,
Remembering everything. It recovered in my hand.
Then a voice like a selected weapon
Or a measured injection,
Coolly delivered its four words
Deep into my ear: 'Your wife is dead.'

What did happen that Sunday night?
You left me? Or is what I remember of
Doubt & said to my last sign of you
Barring your farewell letter to me
Only you had not meant it
Yet with that strange smile, as if you had meant
Something quite different.

Has it reached me sooner than you planned?
Had you thought out a plan? To dip me
into a tidal wave incapable
Of what was preparing (or as if it had reached me
Saturday morning as it showed) have — by then
You (who) have reached (you're). You alone have run
From behind those strong (very wet)
Of your farewell note your
Unto the mystery of that weekend ~~asleep~~ —
~~because the note~~ I waited from you, & vanished from you
I cannot imagine
Now I can't have got things the two days
Two days of having lost you
Of the morning you died — as I seemed have imagined —
Wanted to give no help to you doctored —
Now I have completed the calculation
Of my won-out escape
I do believe it. I believe you know it.
But the note reached me to you in the same
You posted it. Friday afternoon.

(2)

What did happen but Sunday night.
You at night? ~~But~~ What I remember of it
double - in the bed & my feet were up?
Drooping you. You could tell them?
As if you had not much of it?
Yet the last stage would do if you had not
Something quite different.

That I recollect now comes to you now?
Had you a telephone call to drop me
into a taxi? ~~bed~~ what
Or what was ~~preparing~~ for me? If it was and then
Saturday morning at 7 o'clock have — by the
way whom those remarks (for so few words)
from him took most of you farewell note
into the mystery of your arrival.
I almost thought
that I could have felt it happen the two days.
Two days of being lost in? Two days have passed —
of staying in bed — in? Two days have passed —
Whom? Please tell me before all you know,
I do believe it. I believe he knew it.

But the note was to me.
Friday afternoon — the same day you left it.
The postman had received it.
It was a stamp of his bed.
From about the Post Office
and addressed to you had? more text.
as if next day nothing if I caught it.
before in his place. But that is very

In our own wedding bed — the same from which
Within three years she would be taken to die
in that same hospital where, with her children,
she would fit you dead. Monday morning
I drove her to work, in the city of Boston.
Then parked in her room, and by 2pm I
had returned to where the telephone waited.
And happened that night in your winter,
what happened that night in your winter,
what happened as if it never happened
to go as human as if it never happened
what accumulation of your note life,
what effort ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~
~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~ ~~desperation~~
and you ~~were~~ ~~were~~ ~~were~~ ~~were~~ ~~were~~ ~~were~~
into the next
I had the phone number of the receiver —
Did the phone ring back? ~~at the receiver~~
With the telephone to the bed
as if you were already in bed
(if a telephone ring, in a room
that we already had) I went to bed
Has after you had to the phone gone
at the end of the George Room
at the end of the George Room still walking
in the ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~
you finally became the ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~ ~~George Room~~
middle where you ended with more attitude, and then
Lay off. Sleeps robust, well as possible again.
Town to place for me now again. ~~At the end of the George Room~~
but not in bed. ~~At the end of the George Room~~
One place. And now down, sitting ~~at the end of the George Room~~
I want to have ~~At the end of the George Room~~
You ~~At the end of the George Room~~ ~~At the end of the George Room~~
already ~~At the end of the George Room~~ ~~At the end of the George Room~~
the big role to be if the State Schools to get
on ~~At the end of the George Room~~ ~~At the end of the George Room~~ ~~At the end of the George Room~~